SEPTEMBER 11, 2025

CODESA - PURPOSE

A SPECIALIZED UNIT UNDER COMESA WITH A TEN-YEAR MANDATE TO ACCELERATE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, STRENGTHEN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

CREATED BY
EUSL AB
Care to Change the World

Table of Contents

Purpose of CODESA

Introduction

The COMESA Digitalisation, Education, and Social Agency (CODESA) is conceived as a specialized unit under the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) with a ten-year mandate to accelerate digital transformation, strengthen social development, and institutionalize capacity building across Member States. Its design follows COMESA's established practice of creating specialized institutions by decision of the Authority (Heads of State and Government) upon recommendation of the Council of Ministers, operating under a founding Charter and a Host Country Agreement. This pathway is consistent with the Treaty's framework for the actions of the Authority and Council and the long-standing approach taken for institutions such as the COMESA Competition Commission, which operates with international legal personality under regional instruments. [TREATY - COMESA], [COMESA COM...EGULATIONS]

CODESA will be structured as a public-interest, public-private partnership instrument funded by external partners, ensuring no fiscal burden to the COMESA budget while delivering programs that align with Member States' priorities and the regional integration agenda. Its purpose is complementary to existing institutions, not duplicative. It will formalize cooperation with ACTESA where agricultural trade and market systems intersect with digital infrastructure and social programs, thus embedding CODESA within COMESA's institutional family by design and practice. [COMESA, Wo...gional ...], [ALLIANCE F.... - COMESA]

Strategic relevance and regional context

COMESA's current strategic trajectory includes an explicit emphasis on digital market integration, cybersecurity, and enabling policy and regulatory environments for the digital economy. The World Bank–supported Inclusive Digitalization for Eastern and Southern Africa (IDEA) Program, launched with a regional coordination role for COMESA in April 2025, sets quantitative ambitions for expanding internet access and uptake over an eight-year horizon and mandates COMESA to lead regional coordination, knowledge exchange, and policy harmonization. The program's first phase includes a grant to COMESA and country operations, underscoring the Secretariat's role in digital integration across the region. CODESA is designed to complement this trajectory by providing a permanent, specialized unit to execute multi-country digitalisation, capacity building, and PPP program delivery over a decade. [COMESA, Wo...rating ...], [Inclusive...am: Angola]

The regional baseline remains challenging. As COMESA's announcement of IDEA highlighted, high-speed coverage in Eastern and Southern Africa still reaches only about two-thirds of the population, while actual usage lags even further, creating a substantial inclusion gap that requires both infrastructure and institutional interventions. An agency dedicated to digitalisation, education, and social integration can help bridge this gap by coupling infrastructure deployment with regulatory harmonization, skills development, and service uptake strategies. [COMESA, Wo...rating ...]

Major pillars

1. Strategic alliance for SFPSEI

CODESA will formalize a cooperative division of labor with ACTESA to deliver the Staple Food Programme SDEP ECHO Implementation (SFPSEI). Under this alliance, CODESA will lead the Social Digital Empowerment Program and related digital public infrastructure required for traceability,

logistics, market information, and beneficiary-facing services, while ACTESA continues to direct commodity trade programs, seed and input harmonization, warehouse receipt development, and cross-border market integration within its existing CAADP-aligned remit. This arrangement leverages ACTESA's legal and institutional mandate dating from its establishment by the Heads of State in 2009, while avoiding duplication and concentrating CODESA on digital, social, and capacity functions that strengthen the performance and measurability of staple food trade initiatives. [ALLIANCE F.... - COMESA], [About ACTE...ESA COMESA]

This pillar will be governed by a cooperation memorandum codifying joint steering, data-sharing, brand architecture, a non-duplication clause, and a shared results framework. The objective is to achieve integrated outcomes in food security, market efficiency, and farmer incomes by connecting physical commodity systems to trusted, interoperable digital services.

2. Digitalisation and connectivity

CODESA will design and deliver a region-wide digitalisation program modeled on the Swedish Open Broadband Community design principles to advance inclusive, wholesale-friendly broadband, open access, and interoperable e-government services. The program will align with COMESA's evolving digital agenda, including the IDEA Program's regional coordination, regulatory harmonization, and private investment mobilization functions led by the Secretariat, and will support the creation of digital public infrastructure building blocks (secure identity, payments, data exchange, registries, and service portals). The approach anticipates a multi-country reference architecture, cybersecurity baselines, cross-border data protocols, and a structured PPP mechanism to crowd-in private capital, consistent with the IDEA emphasis on enabling environments and productive digital use. [COMESA, Wo...rating ...], [Inclusive...am: Angola]

3. Pan-African Power Play (PCPP)

CODESA will deploy social equity and cooperative governance programs under the Agenda for Social Equity 2074 framework as a regional instrument aligned with continental priorities under Agenda 2063. The intention is to activate private sector participation in public-interest outcomes, institutionalize inclusive governance practices, and support labor- and enterprise-oriented social programs that translate digital infrastructure into measurable welfare gains. By situating the social equity agenda alongside COMESA's regional integration mission, this pillar seeks to link productivity and competitiveness with community inclusion and intergenerational opportunity. [Agenda 206...ican Union]

4. Capacity building and knowledge transfer

CODESA will establish a Digital and Social Innovation Academy to provide structured training for public officials, regulators, SMEs, and civil society in digital governance, PPP design and management, agriculture-tech applications, and MEL practice. This institutional capacity function is directly responsive to the regional coordination role COMESA has undertaken in IDEA, which calls for knowledge exchange, regulatory strengthening, and skills development as prerequisites for durable digital adoption. The Academy will operate continuous cohorts, offer micro-credentials, and host a repository of regional standards, templates, and case studies to ensure that Member States can localize and sustain gains beyond individual project cycles. [COMESA, Wo...rating ...]

Minor Pillars

5. Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Platform

CODESA will institutionalize a structured Public-Private Partnership Platform to catalyze private sector participation in regional development initiatives. This mechanism will serve as a bridge between Nordic and African enterprises, development finance institutions, and COMESA Member States, focusing on sectors with transformative potential such as ICT infrastructure, renewable energy, and social innovation. By embedding standardized risk allocation frameworks, transparent procurement processes, and concession models aligned with international best practice, the PPP Platform will create predictable conditions for investment while safeguarding public interest. Through this pillar, CODESA aims to accelerate the deployment of digital and social infrastructure without imposing fiscal strain on national budgets, thereby reinforcing COMESA's integration objectives and enhancing competitiveness across the region.

6. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

CODESA will establish a Unified Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework to ensure that all programs operate under rigorous accountability and transparency standards. This framework will integrate results-based management principles, harmonized indicators, and real-time data systems to enable evidence-driven decision-making. Independent verification and periodic evaluations will be embedded as non-negotiable safeguards, reinforcing donor confidence and institutional credibility. By aligning MEL protocols with GSIA compliance standards and COMESA's reporting obligations, this pillar will transform performance monitoring from a procedural requirement into a strategic tool for adaptive management and continuous improvement. The MEL system will also serve as a knowledge repository, capturing lessons learned and disseminating best practices across Member States to institutionalize a culture of results and accountability.

7. Compliance and Strategic Integration

CODESA will embed robust compliance mechanisms and strategic integration frameworks to ensure full alignment with COMESA's legal order, Agenda for Social Equity 2074, and the Sustainable Development Goals. This pillar will operationalize governance safeguards through comprehensive risk management, audit systems, and ESG compliance protocols, thereby reinforcing institutional integrity and donor trust. Strategic integration will be achieved by harmonizing CODESA's programs with COMESA's Digital Strategy, trade facilitation measures, and social development priorities, ensuring coherence across regional initiatives. Furthermore, this pillar will provide a structured interface for oversight by GSIA and other compliance bodies, guaranteeing that CODESA's operations remain transparent, lawful, and strategically aligned throughout its mandate.

Cross-cutting principles and governance alignment

CODESA's operating model is anchored in four principles. First is mandate complementarity with existing COMESA institutions, particularly ACTESA, through a formal cooperation framework and a shared results architecture that prevents functional overlap. Second is budget neutrality for COMESA through externally financed multi-donor arrangements, with comprehensive fiduciary, audit, and transparency provisions aligned to recognized regional practice for specialized institutions with distinct legal personality. Third is compliance with Treaty-consistent governance, including clear reporting lines to the Council and Authority via the Secretariat and standardized cooperation instruments clarifying interfaces with COMESA organs. Fourth is regional consistency with continental frameworks, including

Agenda 2063 and ongoing digital market integration measures. [COMESA COM...EGULATIONS], [TREATY - COMESA], [Agenda 206...ican Union]

Funding model and fiduciary safeguards

The ten-year mandate will be financed by external partners, initially envisaged as Sweden and Finland with scope for co-financing by multilateral and private sources, structured through a development fund with donor-grade financial regulations, procurement rules, and third-party verification. This arrangement dovetails with COMESA's current engagement in mobilizing significant external resources for digital integration through the IDEA Program and ensures that CODESA's operations do not increase COMESA's assessed budget. [COMESA, Wo...rating ...]

Implementation approach and ten-year horizon

The initial eighteen months will focus on legal establishment, cooperation instruments, and the first wave of country enrollments under each pillar. Years two to four will concentrate on scaling broadband and core digital public infrastructure, initiating the Academy's multi-track curricula, and operationalizing the SFPSEI alliance in priority staple corridors. Years five to seven will deepen cross-border interoperability, regulatory harmonization, and PPP portfolios, with mid-term evaluations at years three and six. Years eight to ten will consolidate capacity transfer to national institutions, complete independent impact evaluations, and execute an exit or integration transition consistent with the Charter.

PESTEL analysis

Politically, CODESA relies on Council and Authority decisions and on cooperation with ACTESA and the Secretariat; the enabling legal order and precedent of specialized institutions indicate feasibility, while the need for consensus management across diverse Member States implies careful diplomacy. Economically, digital infrastructure and harmonized services can reduce transaction costs and catalyze private investment, an objective reflected in current regional digital initiatives. Socially, persistent gaps in usage and skills underscore the importance of capacity building to convert infrastructure into equitable access and outcomes. Technologically, the region is poised to benefit from open, interoperable architectures and shared cybersecurity baselines to ensure trust and resilience. Environmentally, digital public infrastructure can improve monitoring and efficiency in sectors such as logistics and agriculture, while broadband deployments must respect safeguards. Legally, the Treaty provides the institutional staircase for establishment decisions, while prior instruments demonstrate that specialized bodies may hold international legal personality and operate under host agreements.

PESTEL analysis

Factor	Key considerations	Strategic implications
Political	Authority/Council competence to establish specialized units; need for complementarity with ACTESA and alignment with Secretariat processes. [TREATY - COMESA], [ALLIANCE F.... - COMESA]	Early cooperation instruments and a non-duplication clause reduce resistance and ease Council placement.
Economic	Regional push to mobilize external financing and private investment for digital access and	A multi-donor fund and PPP platform allow scale without COMESA budget exposure.

Factor	Key considerations	Strategic implications
	productive use. [COMESA, Wo...rating ...], [Inclusive...am: Angola]	
Social	Coverage–usage gap and digital skills deficits constrain inclusive adoption. [COMESA, Wo...rating ...]	A standing Academy and country cohorts convert infrastructure into human capital and service uptake.
Technological	Need for interoperable digital public infrastructure and baseline cybersecurity across borders. [COMESA, Wo...rating ...]	Reference architectures and shared standards lower integration costs and enhance trust.
Environmental	Digitalisation enables efficiency and monitoring in logistics and agriculture; safeguards remain necessary.	Environmental and social safeguards framework embedded in program design.
Legal	Treaty architecture, specialized-institution precedent, and legal personality models are established. [TREATY - COMESA], [COMESA COM...EGULATIONS]	Adoption of a Charter, Host Country Agreement, and cooperation agreement ensures lawful, durable operation.

SWOT analysis

CODESA's strengths include a purpose-built mandate, budget neutrality, and a design that complements existing institutions, aligning with current regional digital priorities and enabling instruments. Its weaknesses are largely political-procedural, including the need to navigate multi-organ approval, manage perceptions vis-à-vis ACTESA, and maintain discipline against scope creep. Opportunities are substantial, including leveraging the IDEA Program's momentum, crowding-in private investment, and embedding cross-border standards and skills at scale. Threats include shifting political priorities, donor fatigue, cyber risks, and the risk of institutional duplication if cooperation instruments are not sufficiently explicit.

SWOT analysis (table)

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Specialized, budget-neutral unit aligned with Treaty procedures and institutional precedents. [TREATY - COMESA], [COMESA COM...EGULATIONS]	Multi-organ approval and diplomacy required; risk of perceived overlap without formal MoUs. [ALLIANCE F.... - COMESA]	Regional digital push and IDEA coordination role create scale pathways and policy windows. [COMESA, Wo...rating ...]	Political shifts, donor variability, and cybersecurity incidents could affect timelines and trust.

Conclusion and next steps

CODESA offers a lawful, strategically aligned, and fiscally neutral mechanism to institutionalize digitalisation, social development, and capacity building across COMESA. Its cooperative arrangement with ACTESA positions it to enhance—not replace—the region's agricultural trade agenda by adding durable digital and social capabilities. The next steps are to finalize the constitutive instruments for Council and Authority consideration, settle the cooperation framework with ACTESA, and prepare an initial three-year operational program consistent with the IDEA Program's regional coordination horizon.

References

- COMESA Treaty (English). comesa.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Comesa-Treaty.pdf

- COMESA Competition Regulations (legal personality of the Commission).
  comesacourt.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/COMESA-Competition-Regulations-December-2004.pdf

- COMESA Institutions (context on specialized institutions). comesa.int/comesa-institutions-2

- ACTESA: establishment and mandate (Authority decision of 9 June 2009; CAADP alignment).
  actesacomesa.org/about-actesa, comesa.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/3n.-ACTESA-IC-and-Council-Report-November-2023_EN-2.pdf

- COMESA and World Bank: Inclusive Digitalization for East and Southern Africa (IDEA) – regional role, first phase, access and usage baseline. comesa.int/comesa-world-bank-launch-2-5-billion-programme-on-accelerating-digital-access, worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2024/06/27/inclusive-digitalization-in-eastern-and-southern-africa-program-afe-angola

- African Union Agenda 2063 – continental development framework.
  au.int/en/agenda2063/overview